



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Public Instruction  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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\*\*\***NEWS RELEASE**\*\*\*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Youth Risk Behavior Survey provides important information on student health and well-being

MADISON—Wisconsin students reported less violence in their lives and better mental health since the first Youth Risk Behavior Survey was administered 15 years ago. As in previous years, students who report having strong social support were less likely to engage in the risky behaviors that can endanger their health and have a negative impact on their education.

“This biennial survey provides important information about the health and well-being of our students,” said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster. “What we learn from our high-schoolers through this survey informs development of programs and interventions that can help future students achieve greater success.”

According to the survey, the percentage of youth fighting and carrying a weapon on school grounds or anywhere in the community declined over 15 years. Student reports of fighting at school dropped from 16 percent in 1993 to 11 percent for 2007. Students who reported carrying a weapon at school went from 9 percent to 4 percent and in the community it went from 19 percent to 13 percent between 1993 and 2007. The Department of Public Instruction collaborates with the state Office of Justice Assistance and others to sponsor statewide training conferences on school crisis preparedness. Additionally, the department produces monthly Safe Schools webcasts on school safety strategies and works with the state’s 12 cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs) to provide consultation and tools for violence prevention.

Students reporting depression decreased from 28 percent to 22 percent between 1999 and 2007. Students considering suicide dropped from 27 percent to 15 percent, and students reporting they had made a suicide plan decreased from 15 percent to 10 percent. Unfortunately, the percentage of reported suicide attempts is approximately 8 percent for high school students; unchanged over 15 years.

“While we have made progress in recognizing and getting help for students who are struggling with mental health issues, we still have work to do,” Burmaster said. “The tragedy of losing one student to suicide must spur our efforts to reach out.”

(more)

The DPI has worked with other agencies and community partners to develop materials to help districts confront mental health issues. Wisconsin's *Toolkit for Mental Health in Schools* is designed to help eighth- through 10th-grade students learn to deal with friends who may have mental health problems and to develop skills that contribute to a mentally healthy school. The DPI's *School-Based Suicide Prevention Toolkit* and training prepare educators to recognize warning signs and make referrals for help.

Although Wisconsin has seen a decrease in violence and suicide risk-taking behavior, one out of five high school students surveyed reported being bullied and harassed, sometimes physically, while at school. One-half of students said they feel that bullying is a problem at their school.

"Bullying has a detrimental effect on all students," Burmaster said. "Our bullying prevention policy guidelines and curriculum, introduced last spring, address this behavior head on. The materials include instructional units for students in grades three through five and grades six through eight to help students become the solution to bully-free schools."

The vast majority of students say they have a family that gives them love and support (87 percent). Seventy-six percent of students said they had two or more adults they could go to for help. Students also reported positive influences at school with 94 percent saying they feel safe, 70 percent saying they feel they belong, and 60 percent saying their teachers really care and give support and encouragement.

"These positive influences provide a safety network that helps young people negotiate difficulties they will inevitably face," Burmaster said.

The 2007 survey results also showed

- fewer students are experimenting with alcohol before the age of 13; alcohol use in the past month among high school students was 49 percent, the same as in 1993;
- fewer students are having sex; those who are sexually active are abstaining longer before first sexual intercourse; and among sexually active youth, more are using condoms;
- more students are wearing seat belts on a consistent basis and fewer are a passenger in a car in which the driver has been drinking; and
- use of cigarettes and other tobacco products has decreased significantly; fewer students are experimenting or smoking cigarettes on a regular basis; fewer students are using smokeless tobacco.

The DPI administered the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey to 2,094 students in 56 public schools across the state last spring as part of a national effort by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to monitor health-risk behaviors among the nation's high school students. Students voluntarily completed the self-administered survey. The 99-question survey is anonymous. Survey procedures protect the privacy of students and local parental permission procedures were followed before survey administration.

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**NOTE:** A chart of survey highlights follows. This news release is available electronically at [http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008\\_25.pdf](http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008_25.pdf). Additional information about the Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey is available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/yrebsindx.html>.

# 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

## Survey Highlights

(percent of 9th- through 12th-grade students who report)

	1993	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007
Having Family Support	NA	81	81	82	88	88	87
Exercising Regularly	64	62	60	64	63	71	69
Feeling Safe at School	94	97	96	94	94	95	94
Never Having Sexual Intercourse	53	59	59	61	63	60	55
Fighting at School	16	13	11	11	12	12	11
Fighting Anywhere	39	34	33	31	31	33	31
Carrying Weapons	19	15	18	13	13	16	13
Considering Suicide	27	24	22	20	20	18	15
Using Tobacco	32	36	38	33	24	23	21
Using Tobacco at School	13	17	16	10	8	6	6
Using Alcohol	48	51	52	54	47	49	49
Binge Drinking	29	31	34	34	28	31	32
Using Marijuana	11	21	21	25	22	16	20
Receiving Drug Offers at School	20	28	29	27	26	22	23